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Testimony of Joseph R. Marfuggi
President and CEO, Riverfront Recapture
March 14, 2014

My name is Joseph Marfuggi. I live in Hartford and I am president of Riverfront Recapture. **I am here to testify in support of a provision in Senate Bill 332 that has the potential to formalize an existing parks management plan between the Metropolitan District Commission and Riverfront Recapture.**

In 1997, the General Assembly gave MDC the authority to take on some riverfront management responsibilities – and to increase the water rate to pay for these efforts. An average \$6 increase per year, per household, paid for daily maintenance and a park rangers program that put uniformed personnel in the parks. MDC was, and is, a logical partner for the riverfront parks. MDC has experience in managing public trails at its reservoirs and, more importantly, MDC has invested millions of dollars and decades of hard work to clean up the Connecticut River, helping to transform it from a polluted waterway to a scenic destination for public recreation. The management plan has played a critical role in making the riverfront parks attractive destinations for people who live, work, or visit here. We welcomed 800,000 visitors to the riverfront parks last year. A third of the 96 teams in our Dragon Boat Races came from New York City, Boston, Providence, and other out of state locations. Our rowing regatta attracted 3,000 rowers from five states. Even on non-event days, the riverfront parks are priceless amenities for the people of this region. They come to the parks to walk, jog, row, bike, fish, or enjoy some quiet time in a beautiful natural environment – where they might even see a bald eagle.

But we can't assume that the Riverfront will continue to be a valuable asset if it is not maintained. As we worked out our parks management agreement with MDC, we looked at waterfront projects across the country – and saw what can happen when a solid management plan is not in place. A southern city dedicated an expensive new park with great fanfare – but without giving much thought to maintenance and programming. Two years later, a local newspaper described the park as “an albatross around our necks.”

Now we are trying to work out a renewal of the long-standing parks management agreement between MDC and Riverfront Recapture. We are concerned, however, that MDC has proposed a 25% reduction in the riverfront parks management budget – and a phase out of all funding for the parks rangers over five years. To be clear, Riverfront Recapture did not propose section 5 of SB 332, which would require MDC to make a continued effort to maintain the riverfront parks. But we support its passage because it is vitally important to keep the riverfront parks maintained as they have been since their creation.

The public has come to expect that the riverfront parks will be well-maintained on a daily basis – that the grass will be mowed and broken glass and graffiti removed. The rangers' presence in the parks helps to reduce maintenance costs by minimizing vandalism and our visitors tell us that the park rangers make them feel comfortable and secure in the parks. It wouldn't take many bad incidents to reverse those good feelings – and send the riverfront parks on a downward spiral that would turn these wonderful assets into destructive liabilities.

None of us want that to happen. We believe that the proposed amended language in this Bill provides a framework for the development of a detailed plan to help sustain the riverfront parks for generations to come – enhancing the region's quality of life and serving as catalysts for economic investment and growth on both banks of the river. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.